Between Internationalism and Identity: A Comparative Analysis of Socialist, Zionist, and Anarchist Syntheses in Jewish Political Thought

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This paper explores the profound intellectual tension between universalist socialist ideals and particularist national aspirations through the lens of eight pivotal figures in Jewish political history. At the turn of the twentieth century, the "Jewish Question" became a primary site of contention for revolutionary thinkers who sought to reconcile the suffering of a specific ethnic minority with the global aim of proletarian liberation. While figures like Rosa Luxemburg maintained a rigid adherence to internationalist dogma, viewing any form of nationalism as a bourgeois distraction, others like Ber Borochov and Moses Hess attempted a dialectical synthesis, arguing that national territory was a prerequisite for genuine class struggle. This study further examines the Bundist alternative of "doikayt" championed by Vladimir Medem, the anarchist rejection of the state embodied by Emma Goldman, and the humanitarian socialist frameworks of Albert Einstein and Hannah Arendt. By analyzing these diverse responses to the challenges of modernity, displacement, and statehood, this paper situates these historical debates within a contemporary context. It asks how these revolutionary blueprints for social organization and identity might be reinterpreted in the twenty-first century, offering a comprehensive overview of a political lineage that remains essential for understanding the intersection of identity and global justice.

Keywords: Socialism, Zionism, Internationalism, Jewish political theory, Marxism, Anarchism, Universalism, Particularism, Diaspora, Rosa Luxemburg, Hannah Arendt, Jewish Question, Class Struggle, National Liberation.

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1. Introduction: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Modernity

The Jewish Question was never a single, static inquiry but rather a multifaceted crisis of identity, belonging, and political organization that erupted from the breakdown of the feudal order in Europe. As the Enlightenment and the French Revolution dismantled the legal and social barriers of the Old Regime, the Jewish population found itself thrust into a world that demanded a radical redefinition of what it meant to be a people. The promise of emancipation offered by the liberal state was a double-edged sword; it granted legal equality to the individual while often demanding the dissolution of the collective. This tension became the central drama of Jewish life in the nineteenth century, as the ghetto walls collapsed and were replaced by the invisible but no less rigid boundaries of modern nationalism and class struggle.

Modernity presented a profound paradox for the Jewish intellectual. On one hand, the secularization of society and the rise of rationalism provided the tools for Jewish integration into the broader European culture. On the other hand, the rapid onset of industrial capitalism and the birth of the modern nation-state created new forms of exclusion that religious conversion could no longer bridge. This era was defined by a transition from traditional, religiously motivated Judeophobia to a new, secularized, and purportedly scientific antisemitism. This shift meant that even the most assimilated Jew could no longer escape their identity through cultural mimicry or religious renunciation. The crisis of modernity was, therefore, an existential one, forcing a choice between the pursuit of universal human rights and the necessity of particularist self-preservation.

1.1 The Enlightenment and the Dilemma of Emancipation

The origins of the Jewish political crisis can be traced to the divergent paths of emancipation across Europe. In Western Europe, the Napoleonic model offered civil rights in exchange for the abandonment of national or communal distinctiveness. The famous declaration that Jews should be granted everything as individuals but nothing as a nation set a precedent that forced Jews to view their identity as a private religious matter rather than a public political one. This "contract" of emancipation worked reasonably well for the burgeoning Jewish middle class in France, Germany, and Britain for several decades, fostering a period of unprecedented cultural and scientific achievement. However, the price of this admission was a constant state of anxiety regarding the "authenticity" of Jewish belonging in the eyes of the host nation.

In Eastern Europe, where the vast majority of the world's Jewish population resided within the Pale of Settlement, the situation was markedly different. There, the Russian Tsarist autocracy remained largely immune to the liberalizing trends of the West. The Jewish masses lived in a state of perpetual economic precariousness and legal disenfranchisement, subjected to periodic pogroms and discriminatory decrees. For these millions, the liberal promise of gradual

emancipation felt like a cruel fantasy. It was in this crucible of state-sponsored violence and systemic poverty that the most radical political responses were forged. The failure of the state to protect or integrate its Jewish subjects led directly to the conclusion that the existing order must be either fundamentally overthrown through social revolution or escaped through national migration.

1.2 The Rise of Scientific Antisemitism and the Failure of Liberalism

By the late nineteenth century, the liberal dream of a rational, post-prejudice society began to unravel. The rise of ethno-nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe redefined the nation not as a community of citizens bound by law, but as a biological or mystical entity bound by blood and soil. In this new framework, the Jew remained the permanent "other," an internationalist element that supposedly threatened the purity and stability of the national body. The Dreyfus Affair in France and the rise of Karl Lueger's Christian Social Party in Vienna served as a wake-up call to Jewish intellectuals who had believed that assimilation was the final answer to the Jewish Question.

The realization that antisemitism was not a vestige of medieval ignorance but a modern political tool used to mobilize the masses against the liberal order was devastating. It suggested that the Jewish position in Europe was structurally unstable. If the liberal state could not guarantee safety, and if the nation-state viewed the Jew as an eternal alien, then a new political paradigm was required. This failure of liberalism provided the opening for more radical ideologies. Marxism offered a structural critique of the state and promised a world where ethnic identity would be rendered obsolete by class solidarity. Conversely, Zionism argued that the only way to end the cycle of persecution was for Jews to become a "normal" nation with their own territory, army, and state apparatus.

1.3 The Socialist Response to the National Question

The intersection of Jewish identity and the nascent socialist movement created a unique ideological friction. For early Marxists, the Jewish Question was a distraction from the primary struggle between labor and capital. Karl Marx himself, in his early writings, had framed the Jewish Question as an economic one, suggesting that the "social emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of society from Judaism," which he equated with huckstering and the spirit of capitalism. While later Marxists moved away from this crude formulation, the movement remained deeply suspicious of any form of Jewish particularism, viewing it as a barrier to international working-class unity.

However, the reality of the Jewish proletariat in the Russian Empire forced a reassessment. Jewish workers faced a double oppression: as workers exploited by capital and as Jews persecuted by the state. This led to the formation of the Bund, which attempted to marry

revolutionary socialism with Jewish cultural autonomy. The debate within the socialist camp became fierce. Was the Jewish worker a worker first and a Jew second, or were the two identities inseparable in the face of Tsarism? This tension between the universalist aims of the socialist revolution and the particularist needs of a persecuted minority would define the political lives of the figures examined in this paper. From the total internationalism of Rosa Luxemburg to the national-materialism of Ber Borochov, these thinkers represent a spectrum of attempts to solve the crisis of modernity by reimagining the relationship between the individual, the community, and the global revolution.

2. Rosa Luxemburg and the Purity of Internationalism

Rosa Luxemburg remains perhaps the most intellectually rigorous and uncompromising figure in the history of revolutionary socialism. Born into a middle-class Jewish family in Zamosc, Poland, she transcended her parochial origins to become a leading theoretician for the Social Democratic Party of Germany and the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. Her political identity was not merely a set of beliefs but a totalizing worldview that placed the international proletariat at the center of the universe. To Luxemburg, the socialist revolution was a global phenomenon that would eventually dissolve all borders, making the concept of the nation-state an obsolete relic of the capitalist era. Her refusal to compromise this vision, even when it put her at odds with the most powerful figures in the Marxist movement, defined her career and her legacy.

Luxemburg's approach to the Jewish Question and the broader National Question was characterized by a cold, analytical detachment. She viewed the struggles of specific ethnic or national groups not through the lens of empathy or identity, but through the lens of historical necessity. In her view, the development of capitalism was a global process that integrated disparate regions into a single economic system. Any attempt to reverse this integration through national independence movements was, in her eyes, a reactionary effort to turn back the clock of history. This "purity" of internationalism made her a unique and often lonely voice in a socialist movement that was increasingly grappling with the rising tide of 20th-century nationalism.

2.1 The Rejection of National Self-Determination

The most famous expression of Luxemburg's internationalism was her protracted and bitter debate with Vladimir Lenin over the right of nations to self-determination. While Lenin argued that supporting the independence of oppressed nations was a necessary tactical step to weaken imperialism and win the trust of the colonized masses, Luxemburg saw this as a fatal error. She argued that the slogan of self-determination was "bourgeois" and "sentimental," serving only to

strengthen the local ruling classes of small nations at the expense of the international working class. For Luxemburg, the proletariat had no country, and their interests were fundamentally opposed to the creation of new, small states that would inevitably fall under the economic hegemony of larger imperialist powers.

Her opposition to Polish independence was particularly striking, given her own heritage. She contended that the Polish economy had become so deeply integrated with the Russian market that independence would lead to economic ruin for the Polish workers. She believed that the Polish proletariat should instead focus on a joint struggle with the Russian proletariat to overthrow the Tsarist autocracy and establish a pan-European socialist republic. This stance put her in direct conflict with the Polish Socialist Party, which combined socialist aims with nationalist aspirations. Luxemburg's rigidity on this point was born of her belief that the socialist movement must maintain a singular, undivided focus on the global class struggle, viewing any diversion into national liberation as a dilution of revolutionary energy.

2.2 The Universalist Critique of Jewish Particularism

In the context of Jewish identity, Luxemburg's internationalism manifested as a total rejection of Jewish particularism. She famously claimed that she had no "special corner" in her heart for the ghetto, expressing instead a universal empathy for the suffering of all oppressed peoples, from the indigenous workers in South American plantations to the victims of European wars. To Luxemburg, the specific suffering of the Jewish people was not a unique historical tragedy that required a unique political solution; it was simply one manifestation of the broader cruelty of the capitalist system. She believed that the "Jewish Question" would be solved naturally and inevitably through the socialist revolution, which would render all ethnic and religious distinctions irrelevant.

This stance made her a fierce critic of both the Zionist movement and the Bund. She viewed Zionism as a regressive attempt to create a new bourgeois state, which she believed would only replicate the same structures of oppression found in Europe. Similarly, she criticized the Bund's demand for national-cultural autonomy within the Russian Empire, arguing that it would isolate Jewish workers from their Gentile comrades and weaken the unified front against capital. Luxemburg's universalism was so thorough that she often seemed oblivious to the psychological or cultural dimensions of identity. For her, the human being was defined by their position in the mode of production, and any other form of self-identification was a "false consciousness" that would be swept away by the tide of history. This uncompromising stance remains the high-water mark of classical Marxist internationalism, providing a stark contrast to the more identity-focused movements that would emerge later in the century.

3. Moses Hess: The Forging of a Socialist-Zionist Synthesis

Moses Hess occupies a unique and often overlooked position in the history of radical thought, serving as a bridge between the birth of modern communism and the emergence of political Zionism. Often referred to as the "Communist Rabbi" by his contemporaries, Hess was instrumental in the intellectual development of the Young Hegelians and was the man who famously converted Friedrich Engels to communism. Unlike his more famous pupil, Karl Marx, Hess never fully abandoned the ethical and humanitarian roots of his philosophy in favor of a purely materialist interpretation of history. His career represents a profound intellectual journey from a universalist, borderless socialism to a conviction that the Jewish people required a specific national restoration to fulfill their role in the global revolution.

Hess's evolution was not a rejection of socialism but a deepening of it. He came to believe that the abstract internationalism of the early socialist movement failed to account for the organic reality of national identities. While Marx viewed the nation-state as a temporary construct of the bourgeoisie, Hess began to see nationality as a fundamental human category that could not be suppressed without causing social and psychological trauma. His synthesis of these two seemingly contradictory forces—the global struggle for class equality and the particularist struggle for Jewish national survival—predated the formal Zionist movement by decades and provided the ethical foundation for what would later become Labor Zionism.

3.1 From Rhenish Radicalism to Rome and Jerusalem

The early political life of Moses Hess was defined by the radical ferment of the Rhineland in the 1830s and 1840s. He was a central figure in the circle of Young Hegelians and played a crucial role in the publication of the Rheinische Zeitung. During this period, Hess was a committed universalist who believed that the messianic prophecies of Judaism were being realized through the secular medium of the French Revolution and German philosophy. He viewed the "egoistic" spirit of capitalism as the primary obstacle to human flourishing and advocated for a communal social order based on mutual aid and the abolition of private property. For the young Hess, the Jewish people were destined to disappear as a distinct entity, merging into a liberated, unified humanity.

However, the late 1850s and early 1860s brought a dramatic shift in his perspective. The rise of Italian nationalism and the struggle for the Risorgimento deeply impressed Hess, leading him to wonder why a similar national awakening was denied to the Jews. The persistence of antisemitism in Europe, even among his fellow socialists, convinced him that the Jewish people remained an alien element in the eyes of the European nations, regardless of their level of assimilation. This realization culminated in the publication of his 1862 masterpiece, Rome and Jerusalem. In this work, Hess argued that the Jewish people were not merely a religious group

but a distinct nation with a unique historical mission. He asserted that the emancipation of the Jewish people could only be completed through their return to their ancestral homeland, where they could build a society based on the socialist principles of social justice.

3.2 The Integration of Racial and Class Consciousness

In Rome and Jerusalem, Hess introduced a concept that was radical for its time: the idea that the social struggle was inextricably linked to national identity. He used the term "race" not in the modern, pseudo-biological sense of the 20th century, but in the 19th-century sense of a historical and cultural "peoplehood." Hess argued that the Jewish "race" possessed a unique communal instinct that made them naturally predisposed to socialism. He believed that the Torah and the Jewish legal tradition were, at their core, early forms of social legislation designed to prevent the accumulation of wealth and the exploitation of the poor. Therefore, a Jewish return to Palestine was not just a nationalist project but a way to create a "model society" that would demonstrate the viability of socialism to the rest of the world.

Hess's synthesis was a direct challenge to the Orthodox Marxist view that national identity was a form of false consciousness. He contended that a person could only become a true internationalist if they were first rooted in their own national culture. By advocating for a Jewish socialist state, Hess was attempting to resolve the tension between the universal and the particular. He envisioned a future where the world would be a federation of free socialist nations, each contributing its unique cultural and historical genius to the common pool of humanity. This vision of "national socialism" (long before the term was corrupted by the Nazi party) was rooted in the prophetic tradition of social justice and served as a powerful alternative to the sterile, state-centric internationalism that would eventually dominate much of the Marxist movement. For Hess, the liberation of the Jewish nation and the liberation of the global working class were two sides of the same revolutionary coin.

4. Ber Borochov: The Dialectical Materialism of the Jewish Proletariat

Ber Borochov remains the most rigorous architect of Marxist Zionism, providing a scientific and materialist justification for a movement that many of his contemporaries dismissed as romantic or reactionary. While Moses Hess approached the synthesis of socialism and Zionism through an ethical and prophetic lens, Borochov utilized the tools of dialectical materialism to argue that the Jewish national movement was not a choice, but a historical necessity. To Borochov, the "Jewish Question" was not a matter of spirit or religion, but a structural problem within the global capitalist economy. He sought to prove that the Jewish proletariat could never achieve liberation within the Diaspora because they lacked the primary conditions for a healthy class

struggle. His work transformed Poale Zion from a fringe group into a powerful ideological force, grounding the dream of a Jewish homeland in the hard realities of labor and capital.

Borochov's primary contribution was his insistence that the laws of Marxist development applied to nations just as they applied to classes. He argued that for a class struggle to be effective, it required a specific "place of work"—a territory where the proletariat controlled the primary means of production. By applying the Marxist concept of the "conditions of production" to the specific plight of the Jews in Eastern Europe, he identified a fatal flaw in the Bundist and internationalist strategies. He believed that without a territorial base, the Jewish worker was perpetually marginalized, relegated to the "peripheral" sectors of the economy, and thus incapable of leading a revolutionary movement. His analysis was a direct challenge to the "non-territorialism" of Rosa Luxemburg and the "cultural autonomy" of the Bund.

4.1 The Strategic Base Theory

At the heart of Borochov's ideology was the concept of the "Strategic Base." He observed that in a normal capitalist society, the class struggle takes place within a stable territorial framework where the proletariat is rooted in the essential industries—agriculture, mining, and heavy manufacturing. However, the Jewish people in the Diaspora were essentially a "non-territorial" nation. Because they lacked a land of their own, they were excluded from the "primary" stages of production and were forced into the "secondary" and "tertiary" stages, such as trade, small-scale artisan work, and the liberal professions. This lack of a territorial foundation meant that the Jewish worker did not have a solid platform from which to launch a strike or demand political power.

Borochov argued that the Jewish proletariat was a "helpless" proletariat because it was not integrated into the vital organs of the state's economy. If Jewish workers went on strike in a small tailor shop in Warsaw, it did not paralyze the national economy in the way a strike by coal miners or railway workers would. Therefore, the Jewish worker was constantly vulnerable to being replaced or displaced by the "native" proletariat during times of economic crisis. The Strategic Base theory posited that the first task of the Jewish revolutionary was not the immediate overthrow of the bourgeoisie, but the acquisition of a territory where the Jewish people could become a "normal" nation. Only by establishing themselves in a land where they could work the soil and build the factories could the Jewish workers create the necessary conditions for a "genuine" Marxist class struggle.

4.2 Economic Inversion and the Necessity of Territory

Borochov further illustrated the abnormality of Jewish life through his theory of the "Inverted Pyramid." In a healthy national economy, the social structure is widest at the base, consisting of a large majority of workers engaged in primary production like agriculture and manual labor. As

one moves up the pyramid, the number of people engaged in trade, management, and the professions becomes smaller. For the Jewish people in the Diaspora, Borochov argued, this pyramid was turned upside down. The vast majority of Jews were concentrated in the "unproductive" upper tiers of the economy—small commerce, petty trading, and intellectual labor—while only a tiny fraction were involved in the foundational work of extracting raw materials or heavy industry.

This economic inversion was not the result of Jewish preference, but the result of historical exclusion and the "spontaneous" forces of capitalist development. Borochov believed that this inverted structure was inherently unstable and led to inevitable antisemitism, as the Jewish minority was seen as a parasitic or "middleman" element by the surrounding majority. To correct this, he advocated for a process of "productivization." The Jewish people needed to migrate to a territory—specifically Palestine—where the "spontaneous" development of capitalism would force them to rebuild the pyramid from the bottom up. By becoming farmers and industrial workers in their own land, the Jews would "normalize" their economic existence. Territory was not merely a romantic goal for Borochov; it was the "economic laboratory" where the Jewish proletariat could finally escape their marginalization and fulfill their historical role in the global socialist revolution.

5. The Bundist Alternative: Vladimir Medem and the Philosophy of Doikayt

The General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia represented perhaps the most powerful and culturally significant mass movement in the history of Jewish radicalism. Unlike the elitist intellectual circles of the early Marxists or the small, pioneering groups of early Zionists, the Bund was a true grassroots organization that spoke to the immediate, visceral needs of the Yiddish-speaking proletariat. At the heart of this movement stood Vladimir Medem, a man whose personal journey was as complex as the ideology he championed. Born into a family of assimilated, Russian-speaking Jewish converts to Christianity, Medem rediscovered his Jewish identity not through religion, but through the shared struggle of the Jewish working class. He became the preeminent theorist of a "third way" that rejected both the total assimilationism of the internationalists and the territorial escapism of the Zionists.

Medem’s contribution to political thought was the articulation of a Jewish identity that was inseparable from the soil on which the people actually lived. While the Zionists looked to a distant, ancestral past in Palestine, and the internationalists looked to a borderless future, Medem insisted on the importance of the present. He argued that the Jewish people were a legitimate, living nation with a unique language—Yiddish—and a unique social structure that deserved recognition and protection within the existing states of Europe. His philosophy was

one of deep-rootedness and defiance, asserting that the Jewish worker had a right to be "at home" wherever they resided.

5.1 The Doctrine of Hereness and Cultural Autonomy

The cornerstone of Medem's thought was the concept of Doikayt, a Yiddish term meaning "Hereness." This was more than a mere political slogan; it was a profound ontological statement about Jewish existence. Doikayt posited that the Jewish struggle for liberation must be fought "here"—in the streets of Warsaw, the factories of Lodz, and the markets of Vilna. Medem argued that the idea of "next year in Jerusalem" was a dangerous distraction that sapped the energy of the Jewish masses, leading them to abandon their neighbors and their actual material conditions in favor of a utopian dream. For the Bundist, the Jewish people were not a nation in exile waiting to go home; they were a nation that had already made its home in the Diaspora.

To support this lived reality, Medem developed the theory of National-Cultural Autonomy. This was a sophisticated proposal for how a multinational state, like the Russian Empire or a future socialist republic, should be governed. Instead of demanding a separate territory, Medem argued that the state should grant each ethnic group the right to manage its own cultural and educational affairs. Under this system, Jews would have their own schools, theaters, and social institutions funded by the state, but governed by the Jewish community itself. This was a non-territorial form of nationalism that sought to preserve cultural identity without the "poison" of the sovereign state. It was an attempt to create a multicultural democracy where equality did not mean uniformity.

5.2 Opposition to Zionism and the Polish Labour Movement

Medem's "Hereness" put the Bund on a collision course with almost every other major political movement of the era. To the Zionists, Medem was a "traitor" who was leading the Jewish people toward a cultural dead end in a hostile Europe. The Bundists, in turn, referred to Zionists as "Palestinists" and accused them of being utopian dreamers who were effectively collaborating with antisemites by suggesting that Jews did not belong in Europe. Medem argued that Zionism was a form of "nationalist despair," a movement born of the belief that the struggle for a better Europe was already lost. He believed that by focusing on Palestine, Zionists were abandoning the Jewish masses to their fate under the Tsar.

The Bund's relationship with the non-Jewish socialist movements was equally fraught. While the Bund was a constituent part of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, it frequently clashed with leaders like Lenin and Plekhanov. The Bund demanded to be recognized as the sole representative of the Jewish proletariat, a claim that the centralist Bolsheviks viewed as "separatist" and a threat to the unity of the working class. Similarly, in Poland, the Bund found itself caught between the Polish Socialist Party, which emphasized national independence, and

the internationalists, who viewed any talk of Jewish culture as a distraction. Medem navigated these waters with a stubborn insistence that the Jewish worker had a unique dual identity: they were members of the international proletariat, but they were also members of a distinct Jewish nation. For Medem, true socialism was impossible without the recognition of national diversity, and true Jewish life was impossible without the victory of the socialist revolution.

6. Emma Goldman and the Anarchist Critique of the Nation-State

Emma Goldman, often called Red Emma, represents the most radical departure from the state-centric debates of her time. Born into a Jewish family in Kovno, Lithuania, she escaped a life of traditional domesticity to become the most famous anarchist in the United States. While figures like Borochov and Medem were busy drafting blueprints for new social structures or autonomous communities, Goldman was arguing for the abolition of all such structures. Her Jewishness was a cultural and historical fact she acknowledged, but it was not a political anchor. To Goldman, the Jewish struggle was inseparable from the struggle of the entire human race for absolute freedom. She viewed the state not as a tool for liberation—as the Zionists and some socialists did—but as the ultimate instrument of oppression.

Goldman's political philosophy was rooted in a deep suspicion of any form of centralized authority. She witnessed the failures of both capitalist democracy in the United States and state socialism in the Soviet Union after her deportation. These experiences solidified her belief that the nation-state, regardless of its ideological branding, was fundamentally incompatible with human dignity. For Goldman, the Jewish Question could not be solved by adding another flag to the world map. Instead, she believed the solution lay in the dismantling of all flags and the creation of a global society based on voluntary cooperation and the total sovereignty of the individual.

6.1 The Illusion of National Borders

Goldman's critique of the nation-state was centered on the idea that borders are artificial constructs designed to divide the working class and protect the interests of the ruling elite. She famously referred to nationalism as the cradle of war, arguing that it turns people into patriots who are willing to kill and die for a patch of earth they do not even own. In her view, the Jewish people, because of their long history of statelessness, were in a unique position to lead the world away from the trap of nationalism. She found it tragic that a people who had survived for centuries without a state would want to create one of their own, thereby adopting the very tools used to persecute them.

Her stance on Zionism was consistent with her broader anti-statist views. She saw the movement as an attempt to replicate the European model of the Fatherland in the Middle East.

She warned that a Jewish state would inevitably become as militaristic and oppressive as the states of Europe, eventually leading to conflict with the indigenous population and the corruption of Jewish ethical values. To Goldman, the true Jewish homeland was the entire world, and the true mission of the Jewish people was to act as an internationalist ferment, challenging the legitimacy of borders wherever they existed. She advocated for a spiritual and cultural identity that did not require the heavy hand of a government or the violence of a military.

6.2 The Individual vs. the Collective in Revolutionary Thought

One of Goldman's most significant contributions was her insistence on the importance of the individual within the revolutionary movement. While many Marxists and Zionists emphasized the importance of the masses or the nation, Goldman argued that any revolution that sacrificed the individual on the altar of the collective was doomed to fail. She believed that the goal of socialism was not just the redistribution of wealth, but the liberation of the human spirit. This led to her famous sentiment that she did not want to be part of a revolution that did not allow her to dance. She believed that personal joy, artistic expression, and intellectual freedom were not bourgeois distractions but the very point of the struggle.

This focus on the individual created a unique tension in her thought regarding the Jewish collective. She celebrated the rebellious spirit of the Jewish people and their contribution to radical history, but she rejected the idea that any individual Jew owed their primary loyalty to the Jewish nation or the Jewish state. For Goldman, the only legitimate collective was one based on voluntary association and shared ideals, not on the accidents of birth or ethnicity. In the context of 2026, her ideas resonate with modern movements that emphasize intersectionality and the rejection of binary national identities. She provides a framework for understanding how one can be deeply connected to a historical legacy while remaining fiercely independent of its institutionalized and state-sanctioned forms. Her anarchism remains a vital, if uncomfortable, reminder that the state is not the only way—and perhaps not the best way—to organize human life.

7. Manya Shochat: The Militant Collective and the Birth of the Kibbutz

Manya Shochat represents the physical manifestation of the radical synthesis between Russian revolutionary socialism and the pragmatic necessity of Jewish settlement in Palestine. While many of her contemporaries were engaged in theoretical debates in the coffee houses of Zurich or the clandestine meeting rooms of Warsaw, Shochat was on the ground, literally digging the foundations of a new society. She was a woman of action whose life story reads like a thriller, spanning from the inner circles of Russian industrial sabotage to the establishment of the first

socialist communes in the Galilee. Shochat did not just want to discuss the revolution; she wanted to build its infrastructure, and she believed that the unique conditions of Palestine offered a laboratory for a form of collective living that was impossible in the stifling atmosphere of the European Diaspora.

Her contribution to the Jewish political tradition was the transformation of the socialist ideal from a political program into a total way of life. She was instrumental in the creation of the Kibbutz movement, which sought to abolish private property and traditional family structures in favor of a radical egalitarianism. For Shochat, the settlement of the land was not a religious or nationalist mission in the traditional sense, but a revolutionary act of self-transformation. She believed that by working the land collectively, the Jewish people would not only secure their physical survival but also purge themselves of the "parasitic" tendencies developed over centuries of life in the European margins.

7.1 Underground Activism and the Collective Ideal

The roots of Shochat's radicalism lay in the turbulent underground of late-nineteenth-century Russia. Before she ever considered moving to Palestine, she was a key figure in the Labor Zionist movement in Minsk, where she became entangled in the complex and controversial "Zubatov" unions—state-sponsored trade unions intended to divert workers from revolution, which Shochat and her comrades attempted to subvert from within. This early experience taught her the importance of tight-knit, disciplined collectives and the power of industrial sabotage. She was a master of the "conspiratorial" style of politics, a trait she would carry with her to the Middle East. Her vision of socialism was never purely parliamentary or reformist; it was born of the necessity of the underground, where trust and total shared responsibility were matters of life and death.

When she arrived in Palestine in 1904, she was deeply unimpressed by the existing Jewish settlements, which she viewed as bourgeois outposts dependent on cheap Arab labor and European philanthropy. She sought to create a "Communa"—a self-sustaining collective where the distinction between "mine" and "thine" was entirely erased. At the Sejera farm in the Lower Galilee, she helped establish the first collective labor group, which served as the experimental model for the later Kibbutz movement. Her "Collective Idea" was a totalizing one: it encompassed common dining, shared childcare, and the pooling of all financial resources. To Shochat, this was the only way to prove that the Jewish worker could be economically viable and morally superior to the capitalist farmer.

7.2 The Armed Sentinel and Socialist Zionism in Practice

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Shochat's career was her role in the founding of Hashomer, the first organized Jewish self-defense force in Palestine. She realized that for the socialist

communes to survive, they could not rely on the Ottoman authorities or local mercenaries for protection. Hashomer—meaning "The Watchman"—was established as an elite, paramilitary vanguard that combined the discipline of a revolutionary cell with the romanticism of the desert scout. Shochat believed that the "armed sentinel" was a necessary component of the socialist-Zionist project. This was a radical departure from the traditional image of the Jewish intellectual or merchant; it was the birth of the "New Jew," who was as comfortable with a rifle as they were with a plow or a copy of Das Kapital.

The synthesis of armed defense and collective labor created a unique social dynamic that would define the Yishuv for decades. It was a form of "militant socialism" that prioritized the needs of the collective over the rights of the individual, often demanding extreme personal sacrifice. However, this also led to significant tensions. Shochat's commitment to the collective was so fierce that she often clashed with the more moderate leaders of the Zionist movement, who feared her radicalism and her penchant for clandestine operations. Furthermore, the establishment of Hashomer raised difficult questions about the relationship with the local Arab population—questions that Shochat, in her revolutionary zeal, often viewed through the lens of class struggle rather than national conflict. To her, the Arab peasant was a potential comrade in the global revolution, yet the pragmatic reality of Hashomer was the defense of Jewish land against those very peasants. This contradiction would become a central theme in the later history of the region, but for Shochat, the immediate goal remained the survival and expansion of the socialist-Zionist experiment.

8. Albert Einstein: Cultural Zionism and Socialist Humanism

Albert Einstein is rarely categorized alongside revolutionary firebrands like Luxemburg or Shochat, yet his political legacy offers a vital perspective on the intersection of Jewish identity and radical social thought. Einstein occupied a unique space as a global icon whose scientific achievements granted him a moral platform unlike any other intellectual of the twentieth century. While he was a self-described pacifist and a "citizen of the world," he was also a deeply committed socialist and a supporter of the Jewish national revival. However, his Zionism was not the standard political nationalism of the era. Instead, Einstein practiced a form of socialist humanism that sought to reconcile the universal laws of reason and justice with the specific, historical needs of the Jewish people. His political life was a continuous effort to prevent the "necessary" protections of statehood from devolving into the very tribalism he abhorred.

8.1 The Scientific Mind in Political Turmoil

Einstein's socialism was not a mere byproduct of his environment but a deeply considered response to what he called the "predatory phase" of human development. In his seminal 1949

essay, Why Socialism?, he argued that the economic anarchy of capitalist society is the real source of evil. He believed that the "crippling of individuals" under capitalism was the greatest harm of the system, as it forced people into a state of competitive insecurity that stifled their creative and social potential. For Einstein, the solution was a planned economy coupled with an educational system oriented toward social goals. He was acutely aware, however, of the dangers of a totally centralized bureaucracy, warning that a planned economy must be balanced with the protection of the rights of the individual to avoid the "complete enslavement" seen in authoritarian regimes.

His transition from absolute pacifism to a more pragmatic stance was forced by the rise of the Third Reich. Einstein realized that the scientific mind could not remain neutral in the face of absolute depravity. This shift mirrored his evolving relationship with the Jewish community. As a young man, he had little interest in Jewish communal life, but the vitriolic antisemitism he encountered in academic circles—often disguised as a critique of his "Jewish physics"—convinced him that the Jew would always be viewed as an "other" in Europe. This realization did not lead him toward a narrow nationalism, but rather toward a belief that the Jewish people needed to regain their self-respect and cultural autonomy through a collective project.

8.2 A Critique of Statehood and the Pursuit of Universal Ethics

Einstein’s support for a Jewish homeland was rooted in the philosophy of Cultural Zionism, championed by thinkers like Ahad Ha'am. He saw the potential for a Jewish center in Palestine to serve as a beacon of intellectual and ethical life—exemplified by his tireless work in founding the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. However, he remained deeply skeptical of the "state" as a concept. He famously turned down the offer to become the second President of Israel in 1952, citing both a lack of aptitude for dealing with people and a fundamental discomfort with the trappings of state power. He feared that the creation of a Jewish state with borders, an army, and a temporal government would lead to the "narrow nationalism" that had caused so much suffering in Europe.

Throughout the 1930s and 40s, Einstein advocated for a binational solution in Palestine, envisioning a place where Jews and Arabs could live together in a federated system based on functional cooperation rather than ethnic dominance. He warned that if the Jewish people failed to find a way to live in "honest cooperation" with the Arab population, they would have learned nothing from their two thousand years of suffering. For Einstein, the Jewish mission was essentially ethical and universal; if the Jewish state became just another militaristic nation-state, it would be a betrayal of the very tradition it sought to save. His socialist humanism thus served as a constant critique of both the capitalist world order and the potential excesses of his own people’s national movement, holding both to a standard of universal ethics that he believed was the only path to true human liberation.

9. Hannah Arendt: Power, Statelessness, and the Binational Ideal

Hannah Arendt occupies a singular position in the pantheon of twentieth-century political thought, serving as both a witness to the collapse of European civilization and its most profound anatomist. While she shared the radical sensibilities of the socialist and anarchist figures previously discussed, Arendt's primary focus was the nature of the political realm itself—the space where human beings act in concert to create a shared world. For Arendt, the Jewish experience was not a peripheral concern but the central thread that unraveled the failures of the modern nation-state. Her life, marked by her own flight from Nazi Germany and her years as a stateless person in France and the United States, informed a philosophy that was deeply suspicious of sovereignty and fiercely protective of the "right to have rights." In the context of Zionism and socialism, she represented a "third way" that sought to bypass the traps of both ethnic nationalism and state-centric collectivism.

9.1 The Origins of Totalitarianism and the Jewish Experience

Arendt's analysis of the Jewish condition began with her investigation into the breakdown of the nineteenth-century European order. In her seminal work, she argued that the "Jewish Question" was the catalyst that exposed the inherent contradictions of the nation-state. The modern state was built on the premise of a "trinity" of people, territory, and state power. When the legal rights of the citizen became dependent on membership in a specific ethnic or national group, those who fell outside that group—the stateless and the minorities—were effectively cast out of humanity. Arendt viewed the Jews of Europe as the ultimate "pariahs," a people whose existence challenged the state's claim to represent a unified national body.

She famously distinguished between two types of Jewish social responses to this exclusion: the "parvenu," who sought acceptance through assimilation and the mimicry of the ruling classes, and the "conscious pariah," who accepted their outsider status and used it as a vantage point from which to critique society. Arendt identified with the latter, seeing the pariah as a figure of immense moral and political potential. However, she also observed that the rise of totalitarianism transformed this social exclusion into a physical one. The creation of "death factories" was the logical conclusion of a system that had already stripped the individual of their political status. For Arendt, the Holocaust was not merely a Jewish tragedy but a "crime against humanity" committed on the body of the Jewish people, proving that without a guaranteed political space, the human being is reduced to "mere biological life."

9.2 The Federated Alternative to the Nation-State

During the 1940s, as the Zionist movement moved toward the establishment of a sovereign state, Arendt emerged as one of its most articulate and controversial critics. While she had worked for Zionist organizations in the 1930s—specifically helping Jewish youth escape to

Palestine—she became deeply alarmed by the movement's shift toward "maximum" political demands. In her 1944 essay, "Zionism Reconsidered," she warned that the pursuit of a sovereign state based on ethnic dominance would lead to a perpetual state of war and the corruption of Jewish ethical values. She argued that a Jewish state surrounded by hostile Arab neighbors would inevitably be forced to become a "Sparta," a militarized society where the needs of defense would crush the potential for a vibrant, democratic social life.

As an alternative to the sovereign nation-state, Arendt advocated for a "binational" or federated Palestine. Her vision was not based on the romantic notion of two peoples suddenly falling in love, but on the pragmatic necessity of "political friendship" and shared interests. She proposed a system of local and municipal councils where Jews and Arabs would manage their daily lives together, built from the bottom up rather than imposed by a central government. This federated model was influenced by her admiration for the early Kibbutzim and her belief in the American revolutionary tradition of local self-governance. For Arendt, power was something that was generated when people talked and acted together, not something that was exercised by a centralized state apparatus. She believed that the only way to ensure the safety of the Jewish people in their homeland was to integrate them into the Middle East as a neighboring people rather than as a conquering force. Her binational ideal was a plea for a politics that transcended the "poison" of sovereignty in favor of a shared, pluralistic world.

10. Comparative Analysis: Universalist Ends and Particularist Means

The intellectual history of Jewish radicalism is defined by a central, unresolved tension: is the liberation of a specific, persecuted group a stepping stone toward the liberation of all humanity, or is it a distraction from it? The eight figures examined in this study provide a spectrum of answers to this question, revealing that the "Jewish Question" was never merely about the Jews, but about the very nature of universalism itself. In the crucible of the early twentieth century, these thinkers were forced to decide whether the "universal" was an abstract ideal to be achieved by erasing differences—as Rosa Luxemburg argued—or a concrete reality that could only be reached through the fulfillment of particular national identities, as suggested by Ber Borochov and Moses Hess. This comparative analysis demonstrates that while their ultimate ends were often remarkably similar—a world free of exploitation, poverty, and state-sponsored violence—their proposed means were radically divergent, shaped by their differing interpretations of history, power, and identity.

10.1 Divergent Paths to Liberation

When comparing the paths to liberation proposed by these thinkers, a clear divide emerges between those who viewed the "nation" as a cage and those who viewed it as a necessary

foundation. For Rosa Luxemburg and Emma Goldman, liberation was synonymous with the transcendence of the national category. Luxemburg's path was strictly economic and structural; she believed that once the capitalist mode of production was destroyed, the "Jew" and the "Gentile" would disappear into the "Worker." Goldman's path was more psychological and existential, focusing on the liberation of the individual from the "shackles" of the state and religion. For both, the idea of a Jewish state or even an autonomous Jewish culture was a regressive step that would only replace old forms of oppression with new, ethnically branded ones.

In stark contrast, thinkers like Borochov and Hess argued that for a marginalized people, universalism was a luxury they could not yet afford. They saw liberation as a two-stage process. Borochov's materialist path required the "normalization" of the Jewish economic structure through territorialism before a "real" socialist revolution could occur. Hess's path was more ethical and teleological, viewing the Jewish return to Jerusalem as the fulfillment of a historical mission that would eventually benefit all of humanity. Even Vladimir Medem, who rejected the territorialism of the Zionists, argued that the path to liberation must be paved with "Doikayt"—the recognition of the Jewish worker's right to exist as a distinct cultural entity in the here and now. For Medem, as for Borochov and Hess, the "universal" was not something that happened *instead* of Jewish life, but something that happened *through* it.

10.2 The Role of Tradition in Revolutionary Identity

The role of Jewish tradition and "peoplehood" served as another major point of divergence. For Rosa Luxemburg, Jewishness was a biographical accident of no political consequence. Her revolutionary identity was built on the rejection of tradition, which she viewed as a form of "ghetto" thinking. However, for almost all the other figures in this study, the Jewish tradition—whether religious, linguistic, or historical—provided the very language of their radicalism. Moses Hess explicitly linked the socialist future to the Mosaic past, arguing that the social legislation of the Torah was the world's first socialist manifesto. Manya Shochat transformed the traditional Jewish emphasis on communal responsibility into the radical egalitarianism of the Kibbutz, turning a religious impulse into a secular, militant reality.

The role of Yiddish in the thought of Vladimir Medem and the Bund is perhaps the most salient example of tradition serving as a revolutionary tool. To Medem, the Yiddish language was not a "jargon" to be discarded in the name of progress, but the living, breathing medium of the Jewish proletariat. By insisting on Yiddish-language socialism, the Bundists were arguing that the revolution must speak the language of the people it sought to liberate. Similarly, Hannah Arendt and Albert Einstein used the Jewish tradition of the "pariah" to construct a modern ethical framework. For them, being a Jew meant occupying a position of permanent critical distance from power—a tradition of dissent that they believed was essential for the health of

any democracy. Thus, while the "ends" were often the same, the "identity" of the revolutionary varied from the blank slate of the internationalist to the tradition-steeped sentinel of the national movement.

11. The 21st Century Perspective: Revolutionary Legacies in a Post-Industrial Age

To bring the intellectual laboratory of the early twentieth century into the year 2026 is to witness a world that is simultaneously exactly what these thinkers predicted and entirely alien to their expectations. The crisis of modernity that birthed the Jewish Question has evolved into a global crisis of post-industrial capitalism, where the traditional boundaries of class, nation, and identity are being redrawn by digital technology and global migration. In this landscape, the rigid internationalism of Rosa Luxemburg, the territorial materialism of Ber Borochov, and the binational warnings of Hannah Arendt are no longer merely historical artifacts. They have become essential frameworks for understanding a world where the "working class" is increasingly fragmented into a global gig economy and where the nation-state is caught between the pressures of global integration and the reactionary pull of neo-nationalism.

The revolutionary legacies of these eight figures offer a unique mirror for 2026. We see the ghost of the Bund's Doikayt in modern movements for local autonomy and minority rights within multicultural societies. We see the struggle of the "armed sentinel" described by Manya Shochat in the modern securitization of borders. Perhaps most poignantly, we see the failure of the universalist dream to fully extinguish the fire of particularist identity. The 21st century has not seen the "end of history" or the dissolution of ethnic ties into a global proletariat; instead, it has seen a resurgence of the very tensions these thinkers sought to resolve. The debate between "Hereness" and "There-ness" continues to shape the Jewish experience, as well as the experiences of many other displaced or marginalized groups in a world defined by the "statelessness" that Arendt so rightly feared.

11.1 The Gig Proletariat and the Return of Luxemburgist Anxiety

In the post-industrial age, the traditional industrial worker who stood at the center of Luxemburg's and Borochov's theories has been largely replaced by the "precariat"—a class of gig workers, freelancers, and service employees whose labor is mediated by algorithms rather than factory foremen. This shift presents a new challenge to the internationalist ideal. Rosa Luxemburg's critique of national self-determination as a "bourgeois distraction" takes on a new resonance in an era of global supply chains. Today, the capital that exploits a coder in Bangalore is the same capital that exploits a delivery driver in Berlin. In this sense, Luxemburg's vision of a unified, borderless struggle is more technically possible than ever before, yet it remains politically elusive.

The "Luxemburgist anxiety" of the 21st century lies in the realization that while capital has successfully transcended borders, the political movements meant to oppose it have largely retreated into national silos. The rise of digital platforms has created a "global factory" that operates 24/7, yet the workers in this factory often lack the shared language, culture, or physical space that allowed the early twentieth-century proletariat to organize. This fragmentation would likely lead a modern Luxemburg to argue that the focus on identity politics—including modern expressions of Jewish or any other ethnic particularism—is a "false consciousness" that prevents the gig proletariat from recognizing their shared structural position. However, the persistence of these identities suggests that the "human" element of the revolution requires more than just economic solidarity; it requires a sense of belonging that the cold logic of global internationalism often fails to provide.

11.2 The Evolution of Zionism: From Borochov to the Modern State

The transition of Zionism from a radical, socialist experiment to a powerful, modern nation-state represents perhaps the most dramatic evolution of any movement discussed in this paper. For Ber Borochov and Moses Hess, Zionism was a means to an end—a "strategic base" for the socialist revolution or a site for an ethical "model society." In 2026, the reality of the Israeli state is a far cry from the "Inverted Pyramid" that Borochov sought to correct. While the state succeeded in "productivizing" the Jewish people, it did so within a framework of high-tech capitalism and neoliberalism that has largely dismantled the Kibbutz movement and the socialist ethos of the early pioneers.

The modern state of Israel faces the exact dilemma that Hannah Arendt and Albert Einstein predicted: the struggle to maintain a Jewish identity while functioning as a "normal" sovereign state in a volatile region. The binational ideal that Arendt championed remains a fringe position, yet the "one-state reality" that many observers describe in 2026 makes her warnings about the "Spartanization" of society feel increasingly prophetic. The tension between the "militant sentinel" of Manya Shochat and the "universalist humanist" of Einstein continues to define the internal Jewish debate. As the state moves further from its socialist roots, the question remains whether Zionism can survive as a moral project, or if it will become, as Emma Goldman feared, just another manifestation of the "poison" of the nation-state.

11.3 Digital Doikayt and the New Diaspora Identity

One of the most surprising developments of the 21st century is the resurgence of "Bundist" ideas in the Jewish Diaspora. Vladimir Medem’s philosophy of Doikayt—"Hereness"—has found a new life among young, radical Jews in the United States and Europe who reject the idea that their identity must be centered on a distant state. This "New Doikayt" emphasizes the importance of local activism, the preservation of Yiddish culture, and the fight for social justice

within the countries where Jews actually live. In a world of digital connectivity, this "Hereness" is no longer tied to a specific physical neighborhood like the old Jewish quarters of Eastern Europe; it is a "digital hereness" that connects activists across borders while remaining rooted in local struggles.

This modern Diaspora identity often draws on the "conscious pariah" model of Hannah Arendt and the anarchist spirit of Emma Goldman. It views the Jewish experience of statelessness and displacement not as a weakness to be cured by a state, but as a source of strength and critical perspective. In 2026, this perspective is increasingly used to build alliances with other marginalized groups, from climate refugees to victims of racial injustice. The "Bundist alternative" of cultural autonomy without state power is being reimagined as a model for a pluralistic, post-national world. This suggests that the "Hereness" of Vladimir Medem may yet prove to be one of the most durable legacies of the Jewish radical tradition, offering a way to be "at home in the entire world" without losing the specific thread of one's own historical narrative.

12. Conclusion: Synthesizing a New Internationalism

The intellectual journey through the lives and theories of these eight figures reveals that the tension between the universal and the particular is not a problem to be solved, but a permanent condition of modern political life. From the uncompromising internationalism of Rosa Luxemburg to the grounded "hereness" of Vladimir Medem, and from the materialist Zionism of Ber Borochov to the binational warnings of Hannah Arendt, each thinker grappled with the same fundamental dilemma: how can a marginalized people maintain their specific identity without retreating into a narrow nationalism that replicates the very structures of oppression they seek to escape? The history of Jewish radicalism suggests that the answer lies not in choosing one side of the binary, but in maintaining a constant, critical dialogue between them.

As we look toward the remainder of the twenty-first century, it is clear that the traditional models of both the nation-state and the international revolution are in a state of profound flux. The "New Internationalism" required for our era must be one that acknowledges the reality of national and cultural identities while refusing to allow those identities to become the basis for exclusion or state-sponsored violence. It must be an internationalism that is "rooted," as Medem and Arendt suggested—one that recognizes that the struggle for global justice begins in the specific material conditions of the "here and now." This synthesis requires the moral authority of Einstein’s humanism, the structural rigor of Borochov’s analysis, and the rebellious, anti-authoritarian spirit of Emma Goldman.

12.1 The Durability of the Revolutionary Pariah

One of the most enduring lessons from this study is the value of the "conscious pariah" as a political archetype. Whether it was Luxemburg refusing to feel "Jewish sorrow" at the expense of universal suffering, or Arendt insisting on the rights of the stateless, these thinkers demonstrated that the most potent critique of power often comes from those who stand on the margins. In 2026, as the world faces new forms of displacement and disenfranchisement driven by climate change and economic instability, the figure of the pariah becomes a universal one. The Jewish radical tradition offers a blueprint for how to transform the experience of marginalization into a catalyst for systemic change.

This tradition suggests that true liberation is not achieved by becoming a "parvenu"—by simply gaining admission to the existing structures of power—but by challenging the very nature of those structures. For the figures in this paper, the goal was never merely to create a "Jewish" version of the capitalist state or the imperialist army. It was to use the specific historical experience of the Jewish people as a lens through which to imagine a world where the categories of "citizen" and "alien" no longer determine a person's right to exist. This "revolutionary persistence" is the common thread that links the 19th-century prophecies of Moses Hess to the 21st-century struggles for global equity.

12.2 Toward a Pluralistic Global Solidarity

The final synthesis of these ideas leads toward a model of global solidarity that is pluralistic rather than monolithic. The "New Internationalism" must be a "federation of struggles" that allows for the unique cultural and historical expressions of different peoples while uniting them in a shared opposition to exploitation and autocracy. This vision draws heavily on the Bundist demand for cultural autonomy and Arendt's binational ideal. It suggests that the future of human organization may lie not in the consolidation of power into larger and more homogenous states, but in the devolution of power into smaller, networked communities that cooperate across borders.

In this framework, the "Jewish Question" remains relevant as a case study in the challenges of diversity and belonging. The debates between our eight figures serve as a reminder that any movement for social change that ignores the specific needs of identity is doomed to be perceived as cold and alienating, while any movement that focuses solely on identity without a structural critique of power is doomed to become exclusionary. The "New Internationalism" must be large enough to hold both the birds and clouds that Rosa Luxemburg loved and the specific "human tears" she sought to dry. By synthesizing the legacies of these revolutionary thinkers, we find a path forward that honors the past without being enslaved by it, offering a vision of a world that is finally at home with its own diversity.

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